

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Nesting of Spotted Harrier near Northam.—In the paper, "Birds of the Shire of Northam", *Emu*, 74, 1974: 228-244, Masters and Milhinch record the Spotted Harrier (*Circus assimilis*) as breeding south of Grass Valley near Northam. As there does not seem to be very much published about these birds breeding in this area it is thought desirable to give details of a more recent nesting.

C. Richter has seen a pair of Spotted Harriers nesting on his farm about 14 km S.E. of Northam a number of times during the last 10 years, and on October 12, 1978 we both went to a nest he had found there. While we were still some distance away a Spotted Harrier flew from the nest which was about 12 m from the ground in a flooded gum (*Eucalyptus rudis*). This was one of a group of such trees standing approximately 100 m from the Mortlock River with other single trees scattered over a cleared paddock with wheat crops nearby. The nest was not particularly bulky, but rather flat, and made of sticks.

When we again visited the nest in company with P. Lettenmaier on December 10, 1978 two adult birds were in the vicinity. All three of us could see one young bird in the nest. Owing to harvesting commitments we were not able to visit the nest again until C. Richter went to it on January 2, 1979. He had seen the adult birds during the intervening time whilst harvesting in a nearby paddock, but by January 2 they had left the nest area.

—A. L. MILHINCH and C. M. RICHTER, Northam.

Southward Spread of White-backed Swallow on Swan Coastal Plain.—In December 1902 A. W. Milligan (*Emu*, 3, 1903: 21) collected two specimens of White-backed Swallow (*Cheramoeca leucosterna*) at Yanehep. As late as 1948, D. L. Serventy (*Emu*, 47: 278) had no record of the species from further south. From 1957 to 1964 J. R. Ford (*West. Aust. Nat.*, 10, 1965: 8) commonly observed it nesting between Guilderton and Yanehep, but he apparently did not see it south of Yanehep. In 1969 J. Sinagra (*Fauna Bull.* 3 (3), 1969: 49, Dept. Fisheries & Fauna) found a few birds nesting in a sandpit near Wanneroo; they had frequented the area for three years. On February 25, 1977 Andrew Chapman (pers. comm. to G. M. Storr) was surprised to see them feeding over the sea about 3 km off Swanbourne; he had not otherwise observed this species south of Mullaloo.

From July 31 to August 4, 1978 I noted up to five White-backed Swallows flying around a residual knob of crumbly calcareous sandstone in the old quarry in McCabe Street, Mosman Park (now serving as a sports ground). On August 1 I found a group of four tunnels in the west face of the knob. A bird flew into one of them, which I excavated. Five birds flew from the tunnel, which was unlined and clearly used only for roosting.

Soon after this I recorded the species south of the Swan River. In Gladstone Road, Leeming, the Melville Council is depositing rubbish in a currently used sandpit. On August 8 and 9, 1978 four White-backed Swallows were feeding here in the company of Welcome Swallows. On November 11, 1978 I returned to the rubbish tip and found a nesting tunnel in a metre-high cliff of sand above a loose slope of sand; it contained four large young, which the parents continued to feed as soon as I left.

I am grateful to Dr G. M. Storr, Western Australian Museum, for particulars of earlier records of this swallow.

—N. KOLICHIS, Osborne Park.